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THE TERMS OF RELATIONSHIP OF PENTECOST ISLAND

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READERS of Dr. Rivers' now classic work on *The History of Melanesian Society* are well aware of the careful consideration which its author bestows upon the anomalous terminology of Pentecost Island, and his attempts upon the basis of these data to account for those anomalies by postulating equally anomalous marriages. Without undertaking an elaborate study of the whole Pentecost system as revealed in Dr. Rivers' work the writer has recently made a partial examination of it and has observed certain facts which do not appear to have been brought out clearly by Dr. Rivers, facts which may point toward an interpretation different from that which Rivers gives.

The Pentecost system may be represented as in the accompanying tables which give all its essential points. The people of Pentecost are divided into two exogamous moieties, and it appears that these moieties are further subdivided into segments which have force in regulating marriage, but Dr. Rivers was unable to learn much about these and I will pass them over, assuming for the sake of simplicity that the dual division is absolute. For the purposes of this discussion, whether the two divisions are simple or not does not concern us. The terms underlined in each of these tables are those which apply to persons in the moiety of the speaker; the others apply to persons in the opposite moiety.

TABLE I

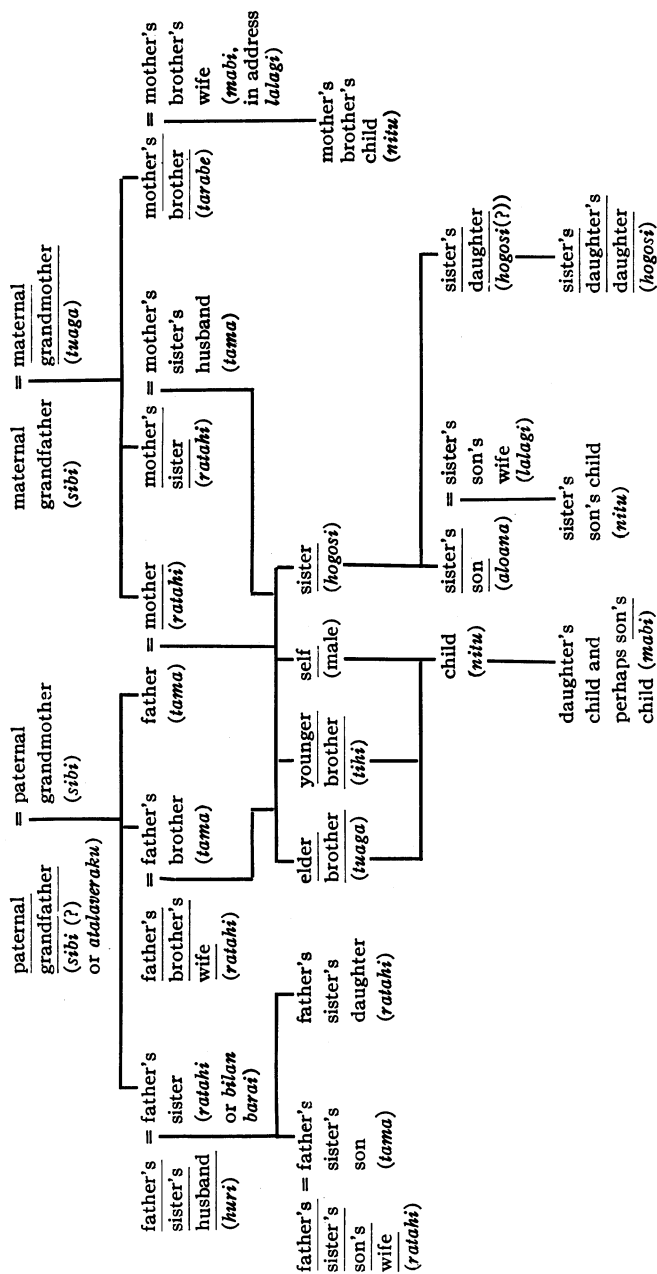


TABLE II

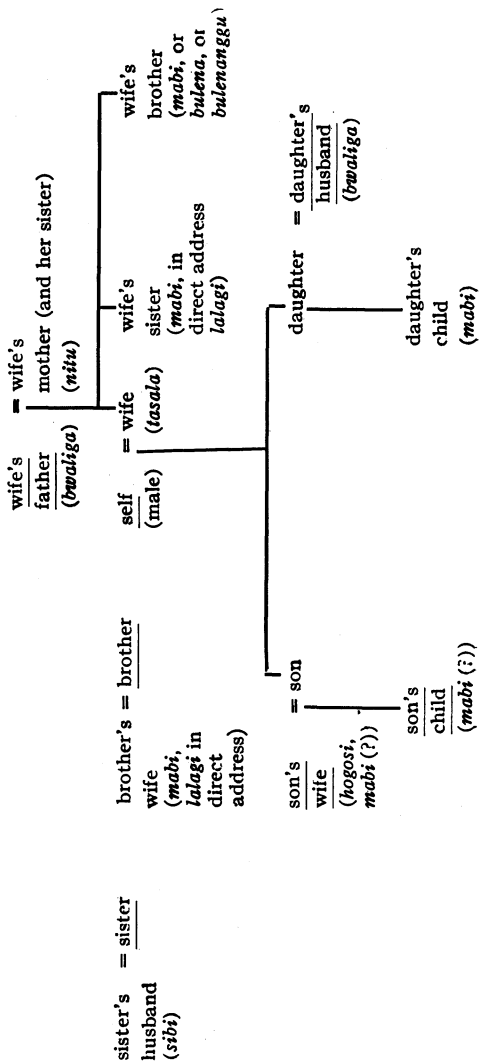


TABLE III.

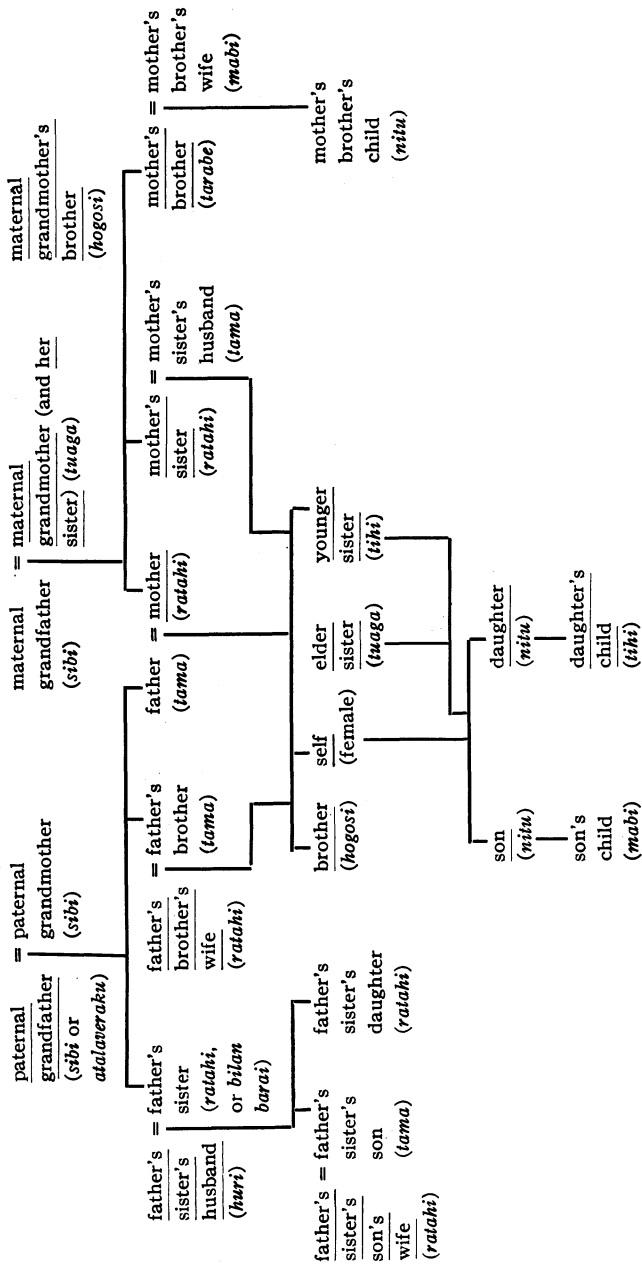
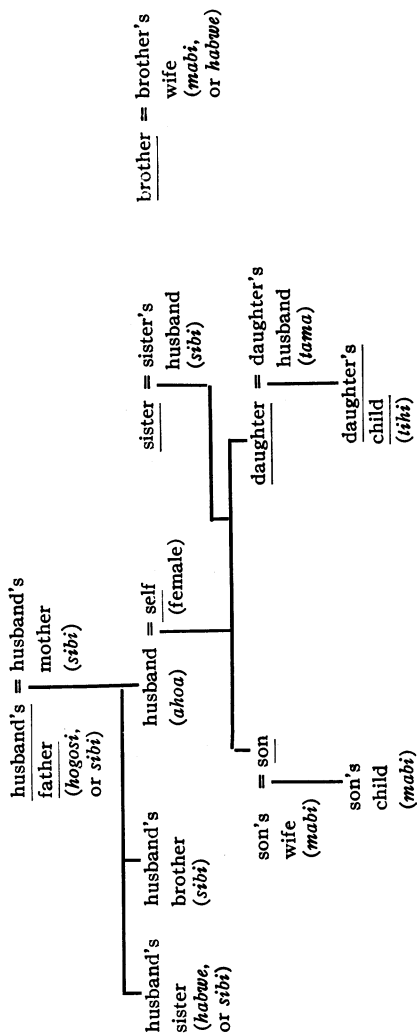


TABLE IV



A certain number of these terms are individual in application or have a very restricted usage. Such are *bwaliga*, *habwe*, *bulena*, *atalaveraku*, *huri*, *tasala*, and *ahoa*. Taking up the remainder we find that the use of *nitu* is governed by blood relationship, since both sexes apply it to own children regardless of moiety, and by extension to brothers' and sisters' children respectively. The term *ratahi* may be used in both moieties, but evidently its more natural and perhaps its original use is in the moiety of self. This probability is strengthened by the appearance of an alternative term for the father's sister, *bilan barai*. The term *tama* is bounded strictly by moiety lines. It is applied solely to men in the moiety opposite from self and seems to have been used for a great number of men in that moiety. On the other side the terms *tuaga*, *tihi*, *hogosi*, *tarabe*, and *aloana* are limited to men and women of the speaker's own moiety, and in each case sex is also distinguished, except that the first three alter with a change in sex on the part of the speaker. Up to this point, we have found but five terms which set apart classes of persons of a defined sex and of the speaker's moiety, although one other (*ratahi*) should perhaps be added to them since it applies rather to members of the speaker's moiety than to those of the opposite. On the other side we have found but one term so used for a class in the opposite moiety, a term moreover given to males.

Now, turning to the two remaining Pentecost terms, *sibi* and *mabi*, we find them put to the following uses:

Sibi is used:

- (1) for the sister's husband by both sexes,
- (2) for the husband's brother by a woman,
- (3) for the husband's sister by a woman, though there is another term,
- (4) for the husband's mother by a woman,
- (5) for the husband's father by a woman, according to one account,
- (6) for the father's mother and the mother's father by both sexes,
- (7) for the father's father by both sexes according to some.

Mabi is used:

- (1) for the brother's wife and the wife's sister by a man,
- (2) for the wife's brother by a man, though there is another term,
- (3) for the brother's wife by a woman, though there is another term,
- (4) for the son's wife, by a woman,

- (5) for the son's wife by a man, according to one account,
- (6) for the son's child by a woman,
- (7) for the daughter's child by a woman,
- (8) for the son's child by a man, according to some accounts,
- (9) for the mother's brother's wife.

Dr. Rivers appears to have assumed, in his consideration of these terms, that their application to the grandparent and grandchildren respectively was fundamental. I wish, however, to call attention to the exceedingly anomalous manner in which they are employed to cover those relations. So far as the writer's experience of the terms of relationship employed by primitive people goes it is usual to find, among those having clans or gentes, one term for grandmother, one for grandfather, and one for grandchild, each often extended to cover many persons. The distinctive thing about them is, however, that they are not used to mark clan or moiety differences. "Grandfather" and "grandmother" are used for males and females two generations back in two different clans or moieties. Some tribes do indeed have a single term for the grandparents, and again we find sex distinguished in the grandchildren. I do not, however, know of a case in which these particular terms were employed to mark off groups in the father's clan from those in the mother's. Nor does Dr. Rivers in his Oceanic work appear to have found anything different in most of the islands which he has investigated. In his present work the only exceptions are the interior of Viti Levu, where there is sometimes a term for each grandparent, and Pentecost. In Pentecost particularly there is a strong tendency in this very direction. Thus the word *sibi* is used unquestionably for the father's mother and the mother's father, both of whom must belong to the opposite moiety, while there is a difference of opinion regarding its use for the father's father, and it is not employed for the mother's mother. The term *mabi* is applied by a woman to her son's child, who must be of the opposite moiety, while she calls her daughter's child *tihī*. On the other hand a man calls his daughter's child *mabi*, while it is uncertain whether or not his son's child should be so called. This result at once raises a question whether the terms *sibi* and *mabi* were not properly used for classes of persons of the moiety opposite from self. And on

going over the tables we find our suspicion confirmed. In six cases *sibi* is applied to individuals of the opposite moiety and in nine cases *mabi* is so applied. In three disputed cases only *sibi* and *mabi* appear to be used for persons of the speaker's own moiety. This assuredly is not accident. Again, we observe that *sibi* is applied more often to men than to women and *mabi* more often to women than to men. *Sibi* is applied to men in five cases, including two disputed cases, and to women in three cases, including one case in which there is an alternative term. *Mabi* is applied to women in six cases, including two doubtful cases, to men in one disputed case, and to individuals of both sexes in three cases, one disputed. The evidence here is not strong, but worth considering at least in the case of *mabi*. It is to be noted that the disputed cases always agree *either* in moiety or sex with the expected. Thus of the three cases in which the use of *sibi* is disputed or in which there are alternative terms two apply to males of the speaker's own moiety, while the third applies to a female of the opposite moiety. Of the four cases in which the use of *mabi* is disputed or in which there are alternative terms one applies to males of the opposite moiety, two apply to females of the speaker's moiety, while the fourth covers both sexes and applies to the moiety of the speakers.

These facts taken in connection with the poverty of terms that can be used exclusively for classes of individuals in the opposite moiety, especially the almost entire absence of such terms for women, lead me to suggest that *sibi* and *mabi* may be primarily collective terms applied to men and women respectively in the opposite moiety. *Mabi* would then be the only term which could be used solely for the class of women into which a man could marry, for we have seen that neither *ratahi* nor *nitu* includes *only* persons of the opposite moiety and *nitu* is indefinite as to sex. Consulting the terms connected with marriage it will be noticed that they are clear on two points, one that a man calls his brother's wife and his wife's sister *mabi* and the other that a woman calls her husband's brother and her sister's husband *sibi*. My suggestion is that *sibi* connoted originally, or at least primarily, a group of males of the moiety opposite from one's own and *mabi* a group of females of

that moiety with whom the women and men of the speaker's clan might marry.

Tuaga was used by a man for his elder brothers and a woman for her elder sisters, and *tihi* was used in the same way for younger brothers and younger sisters respectively. The only other terms which may apply solely to men of the moiety of self are *tarabe* and *aloana*, the former given to the mother's brother, the latter by a man to his sister's son—but perhaps also by a woman to her brother's son, although Dr. Rivers does not give the data for this relation. The Pentecost islanders then have chosen to extend the term *tuaga* over the maternal grandmothers and the term *tihi* over daughters' children. That is the only interpretation the use of such terms requires, and it explains sufficiently why the maternal grandmother's brother is called *hogosi*, a matter puzzling to Dr. Rivers. Why they chose to accept these terms with the connotation placed upon them by women instead of that placed upon them by men, I do not pretend to say, any more than I pretend to say why they used these particular terms instead of extending the terms *tarabe* and *aloana*.

Although not precisely parallel certain terms of relationship in Creek and Chickasaw show that an exogamous group such as I have postulated may include grandparents. In these tribes both the paternal and the maternal grandmother are called by precisely the same term as the father's sister, and along with the father's sister all of the women of the father's clan. All of the relations included agree in sex but differ in clan, for while the father's mother belongs to the same clan as the father's sister, the mother's mother belongs to one's own clan. But while the Creek and Chickasaw have chosen to apply one term to all of the women of the father's clan and to all of the women in the speaker's clan two generations back of him, the Pentecost islanders have chosen to keep one term for members of the opposite clan two generations back of self but have not preserved the distinction of sex. In the same way they have chosen to preserve the distinction of clan in the second generation below the speaker but have not preserved that of sex.

To show the fallacy of the kind of reasoning indulged in by Dr. Rivers I will cite the terms which Creek and Chickasaw women

apply to their mother's brother's child and to their brother's child. Both are called *amosuswa*, the term which men and women alike give to their grandchildren, and in accordance with Dr. Rivers' procedure in such cases we would have to assume that it was customary for a woman to marry someone of the status of her maternal grandfather. Such a marriage is allowable, but in that case the woman's mother, maternal aunt, and maternal uncle would be her stepchildren. The wife of her maternal uncle ought then to be known by the term she uses for her daughter-in-law, *qnhat̄isi*, when as a matter of fact it is *tcqhatcawa*, elsewhere employed to designate the husband's brother or sister, the sister's husband or the brother's wife. Since the uncle was of the woman's own clan we must suppose that the resemblance in terms points to a time when a woman's maternal uncle was her brother and at the same time her stepson. Moreover she calls her brother's child by this same name *amosuswa*, which points to marriage with her own father or her father's brother. Are we to suppose that she married her mother's father and also her father's brother, or that these two were once one and the same person?

As a matter of fact marriage with the father's brother was prohibited by the ancient Creek, and the feeling against endogamous marriages was very strong, too strong for us to suppose for a moment that marriages of the kind indicated could have affected the terms of relationship in any such manner as the one proposed. In short I have no reason to think that the terms which we find reflect any previous marriage customs. In a general way they do mark the presence of a clan system but that is practically all that can be predicated of them. It seems evident to me that the reason why a Creek or Chickasaw woman calls the child of her brother, and the child of her mother's brother *amosuswa* is because she categorizes them with the child of her son. All share this in common that their fathers were men of her clan. It is also extended to those whose mothers were women of her clan except the children of women whom she calls mother or little mother, in which case they are brothers and sisters, and the children of those women whom she calls sister and who are in fact her own sisters, in which case she calls them sons and daughters.

Marriage between a classificatory grandfather and granddaughter would, as a matter of fact, soon cease to have any meaning, since the generations would become inextricably entangled. So far as marriage with one's elder brother's granddaughter is concerned it is quite possible but unless prescribed by a rigid law of which Dr. Rivers has given no indication, it would occur in so few cases proportionately as to have practically no effect upon the terminology of the people. As to the remark of John Patutun, Dr. Rivers' informant, that Pentecost was a place where "they married their granddaughters" it was evidently nothing more than an aspersion founded on his knowledge that men married women to whom they applied the same relationship term as to their granddaughters, nothing more. The fact that the bars are let down in a certain direction doubtless tends to induce the herd to take that course, but it does not follow that because they take that course they let the bars down. If the granddaughter or brother's granddaughter happens to fall into the group from which a man chooses his wife he is more likely to select her than if she does not, but it does not follow that the systematic espousal of granddaughters was the cause of her being in that group.

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